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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on the secondary prevention of delinquency, examining the commonalities that characterize successful programs. The first part reviews standard approaches to secondary prevention of delinquency, such as diversion of responsibility for delinquents from the juvenile justice system to family, school and community-based systems. While most of these diversion programs have not substantially reduced subsequent arrests, successful community-based activity programs are also cited. Other strategies reviewed include educational and vocational training and family-based interventions. The message emerging from this review is that broad-based interventions and settings with multiple purposes and opportunities appear to consistently yield the best results because they provide numerous opportunities for adolescents to develop positive self-concepts and behavior patterns in a variety of contexts. Forty-eight references are included. (TE)

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Secondary Prevention of Delinquency:

More Than Promises from the Past?

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As a result of several recent projects, we have been in the largely unenviable position of digging through the current literature on the secondary prevention of delinquency. This undertaking has left us with several rather clear impressions regarding some of the more promising leads in this area, as well as the state of the research as a whole. Today, we would like to provide you with a glimpse at what we found along the way, as well as some notions about how research in this area might be improved.

Before we get to program specifics, however, a few words about the whole undertaking of the secondary prevention of delinquency are probably in order. Although still an appealing concept, both theoretically and practically, it appears that the wave of enthusiasm and inquiry surrounding such efforts may have crested. Much of the literature in the field is 10 and 20 years old at this point and only a proportionately small amount has been written in the past 5 years. Delinquency prevention is no longer an academically vogue topic. Instead, for better or worse, programs have moved into the mainstream.

This lack of intense questioning about the theory and practice of secondary prevention efforts is unfortunate for a number of reasons. It has left practice static and unchallenged to provide evidence of effectiveness; it has kept broader conceptual frameworks concerning the process of prevention from emerging; and it has stalled innovative applications of the knowledge gained from prevention efforts in other areas to

delinquency prevention.

In the brief time that we have here, we would like to argue that a rejuvenation of interest in the secondary prevention of delinquency is overdue, and that there is existing evidence that can provide valuable guidance for such renewed efforts. A quick review of some of the more notable leads from the existing literature shows that certain practices DO work. Moreover, a close inspection of successful programs shows that there are commonalities that seem to exist across these successes. An examination of these programs and their uniting features, along with a consideration of several theoretical notions from other areas, provides hope that secondary prevention efforts in delinquency can be not only successfully applied but, where needed, systematically improved.

We'll start with a highly condensed and edited version of what is known about several of the standard approaches to the secondary prevention of delinquency.

One widely adopted approach to secondary prevention that deserves close examination is that of diversion; the practice of simply diverting youths from the juvenile justice system, and shifting the responsibility for handling these youths to other social control institutions such as the family, schools or other community-based services. The melding of labeling and social learning theories (Severly and Whitaker, 1982; Schur, 1973) which suggests that juvenile justice processing makes adolescents more likely to view themselves as "bad" and to act accordingly,

underpins this approach and certainly has considerable face validity, even if only tenuous empirical support. Additionally, it is believed that agencies based in the youth's everyday environment will be more effective in dealing with the problems producing delinquent behavior. The goal of diversion programs is to reduce the number of adolescents within the juvenile justice system by limiting the number passed on at each stage of processing, whether by establishing restrictive procedures for moving a case along to the next level of involvement, and/or by providing options for referral at each stage of processing.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the proliferation of diversion programs in the past fifteen years has been successful in its stated goal. Numerous outcome evaluations of diversion programs have shown little effect on reducing subsequent arrests. Instead of a reduction in involvement and control by the juvenile justice system, diversion programs may have "widened the net", expanding the number of youths served by the system (Austin & Krisberg, 1981; Blomberg, 1980; Pratt, 1986). Findings of an increase in the number of youths residing in public and private institutions despite the recent decrease in juvenile arrests and increases in diversion programs (Curran, 1988; FBI, 1989), the increase in criminal charges which accompanied the mandated decrease in status charges, and findings that diverted youth spend a longer period of time in the system and experience as much restrictive control and processing as nondiverted youth (Frazier & Cochran, 1986) all suggest that

diversion policy has not had the intended effect (Klein, 1974; Severy & Whitacker, 1982).

This does not mean, however, that all has been lost in the effort. Others have found successful diversion interventions and outcomes. In several studies, Davidson and his colleagues have found that paraprofessionals using behavioral contracts and advocacy approaches outside of the formal juvenile justice system have been effective in reducing recidivism up to two years after intervention (Davidson et. al, 1977; Davidson et. al, 1987; Davidson & Redner, 1988; Mitchell, 1983). In Colorado, another study of diversion programs found decreases in recidivism rates among project youth using a measure of recidivism adjusted for prior penetration into the justice system (Regoli, Wilderman, & Pogrebin, 1985). Another successful intervention that stands out in the literature, although not technically a diversion program, was Feldman, Caplinger and Wodarski's (1983) study of a group oriented, community-based activity program which mixed antisocial boys aged 8-16 with nonproblem boys. Their multifactorial design found reduced official and self-report delinquency in referred boys, who participated in prosocial groups of predominantly nonreferred boys, which were run by experienced group leaders. In general, one can conclude that while the introduction of diversion policy as a "quick fix" approach did not show the intended effects, particular programming efforts accompanying these policy shifts did show that prevention can be done effectively.

Another major secondary prevention strategy has been educational and vocational training (Grande, 1988; Mesinger, 1981; Siegal & Senna, 1988). Although the causal connection between school dropout and delinquency has been debated (Elliot & Voss, 1974; Thornberry, Moore & Christenson, 1985), there is a clear consensus that academic failure is common among adjudicated delinquents. Based primarily on this consensus, alternative academic and vocational skills training has become an important facet of secondary prevention programs for delinquency. Despite this, there has been a lack of systematic evaluation of the impact of alternative educational programs on delinquency rates (Mesinger, 1981). Several notable exceptions, however, demonstrate that alternative programs can have a profound impact on the lives of adolescents who have failed in traditional classrooms.

First is the classic study by Massimo and Shore (1967; Shore and Massimo, 1966, 1969, 1973). The program offered vocational, remediative educational, and psychotherapeutic intervention to boys who had recently been expelled or dropped out of high school. Follow-up studies five and ten years after intervention indicated that almost all of the randomly selected program youth had adjusted well in terms of employment, schooling, legal and marital status, while nearly all of the control youths were still experiencing severe difficulties in these realms. Unfortunately, the generalizability of these results is limited by the fact that the project compared only 20 young men involved with only one

professional.

The second approach worth mentioning here is embodied in a variety of alternative programs, such as City Lights in Washington, DC (Tolmach, 1985) and The Phoenix Program, in Akron, OH (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1982), which also appear to be successful at involving failing students with behavior problems in academic and vocational training programs; remediating their educational deficits, and reducing behavior problems. City Lights is a community-based comprehensive day treatment program which serves inner-city youths, age 12-22, who are referred from the courts, community mental health, schools, social services and parole officers. The program incorporates crisis counseling, individual, group and family therapy, employment opportunities, recreational activity, and a comprehensive, computer-aided instructional curriculum. In a 1985 evaluation of their first two years of operation they had achieved a 90% attendance rate from youths with histories of chronic truancy (Tolmach, 1985). Similarly, The Phoenix Program has succeeded in returning 90% of its students to public schools, while additionally reporting a decline in recidivism rates (Kratcoski & Kratcoski,1982).

Yet another promising approach to secondary prevention of delinquency is based on the work of psychologists such as Alexander, Hawkins, Patterson and Wahler (Fraser, Hawkins and Howard, 1988; Tolan, Cromwell & Brasswell, 1986), who have helped make family therapy and skills training a popular mode of intervention with conduct disordered children for more than 20

years. Studies of family based interventions with delinquents have shown that family systems and behavioral skills approaches cut recidivism rates by about one half, and have a greater impact on child, sibling and family functioning than do other types of therapy (Alexander & Parsons, 1973; Gordon & Arbuthnot, 1987; Henggeler et. al, 1986; Kazdin et. al, 1989; Patterson, Chamberlain & Reid, 1982, Barton et. al. 1985). However, the exact long term effect on delinquency has still not been clearly demonstrated (Kazdin, 1987). Family intervention has been found to be a more successful technique with younger, aggressive children, than with older, chronic delinquents (Marlowe, Reid, Patterson & Weinrott, 1986; Reid, 1983). The difficulty in assessing the general applicability of these programs arises when one considers that most of them experience a nearly 50% dropout rate, and that most of the dropout families are poorer, more stressed, more likely to have older children and less likely to have social supports (Hawkins et. al, 1987; Fleischman, 1981; Dumas & Wahler, 1983; Webster-Stratton, 1985; Dadds, Schwarts, & Sanders, 1987; Henggler,1986).

So what does this quick review tell us? While certainly not encompassing all of the promising efforts in the field of secondary prevention of delinquency, these programs are mentioned because they entail both widely applied and generally rigorously examined strategies that have shown effects on either self reported or official delinquent activity. Other areas, for example cognitive behavioral interventions in schools (Arbuthnot

& Gordon, 1986; Lochman, Burch, Curry & Lampron, 1984; Yu, Harris, Solovitz & Franklin, 1986), certainly have promising results that warrant attention, but the long term effects of many of these interventions on delinquency are still unclear. Just looking at the above mentioned interventions, however, leaves us with some solid leads about useful ways to structure future conceptualization, research, and practice.

Before these grander issues are touched upon, however, it is worth making a simple observation that would not escape anyone who has had reason to review this literature; that is, it is very difficult to find clear information in this area. The lack of detailed descriptions of the characteristics of the adolescents involved with an intervention, the particulars of what is done with the adolescents or their families, or even the exact measure of success used is striking. Without description of these factors it is very difficult to know what can be, should be, or was, expected of an intervention.

Particularly troublesome is the lack of clarity about program type and approach. In general, the field has developed with the assumption that all programs of the same rubric, such as diversion or vocational training, provide basically the same type and amount of service. Despite the fact that the processes that affect the implementation and strength of an intervention may have greater influence on the program's effectiveness than the program's overall intervention strategy per se (Hackler, 1987; Sechrest & Rosenblatt, 1987), program evaluation outcome studies

for the most part fail to differentiate whether the outcome was related to the specific theoretical basis, the mediating effects of implementation, or the implementation process itself. Without a firmer commitment to documenting and conveying information about the actual process of an intervention, the field will have difficulty providing more than scattered reports of success.

Despite the lack of clear description, there is still a message discernable from the information that is available. The most striking aspect which can be isolated from the successful programs is the intensity and comprehensiveness of these efforts. There is little evidence that any secondary prevention approach, regardless of its modality or theoretical rationale, can produce impressive results when applied in isolation. Curriculums that are coupled with changes in the school environment, or individual interventions that work with the adolescents' home, school, and peer environment, for example, provide more impressive results than myopic programs of similar type. Broad based interventions and settings with multiple purposes and opportunities appear to consistently yield the best results. In many ways, this is simply a testimony to the difficult nature of working with adolescents who get in trouble. It appears that just as there is no single path to continued delinquency, there is no straightforward and uniformly applicable "quick fix" waiting out there to be discovered.

This simple observation about the demonstrated utility of broad based preventive interventions can also be interpreted,

however, as evidence of the importance of taking more seriously the relevance of social roles in promoting positive change in adolescence. Programs that are intervening in multiple spheres can be thought of as forcing the emergence of a consistently positive self across the many settings of an adolescent's life. It is difficult or impossible for an adolescent to avoid certain issues when the intervention agent sees him/her in varied settings, and has a richer understanding of the pressures and influences that make up the "ecological niche" of the adolescent. Similarly, programs that create intensive, multifaceted environments can be thought of as providing numerous opportunities for an adolescent to safely try on different social roles. In many ways, the present results appear to support an increased emphasis on interventions and settings of a more "generalist" nature.

In line with recent descriptive work on the cessation of adolescent antisocial activity, these results also appear to support the necessity to think more broadly about secondary prevention as an effort to capitalize on individual turning points for adolescents. There is some limited evidence that an adolescent may make a change towards positive behavior across numerous social settings at one time, and that this process is triggered by the adolescent's perception of a critical event, forcing a "taking of stock" in his or her present overall lifestyle (Mulvey & LaRosa, 1986; Mulvey & Aber, 1988; Farrington, 1986). This suggests that being there to promote

change when it is first tried, and to support that change should it falter in any sphere of the adolescents' life, may be what makes the most sense as an emphasis for preventive interventions.

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